

HELMUT NEWTON FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

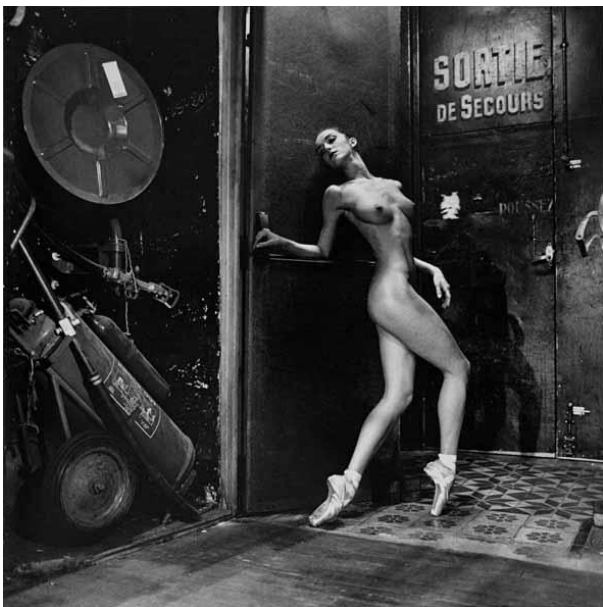
Body Performance

Vanessa Beecroft, Yang Fudong, Inez & Vinoodh, Jürgen Klauke, Robert Longo,
Robert Mapplethorpe, Helmut Newton, Barbara Probst, Viviane Sassen,
Cindy Sherman, Bernd Uhlig, and Erwin Wurm

Press conference: Friday, 29 November 2019, 11 a.m.

Opening: Friday, 29 November 2019, 8 p.m.

Exhibition: 30 November 2019 – 10 May 2020



Helmut Newton, Ballet de Monte Carlo, 1992 © Helmut Newton Estate



Vanessa Beecroft, VB55-Performance, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin 2005 © Vanessa Beecroft

On **29 November 2019**, the new exhibition **Body Performance** will open at the **Helmut Newton Foundation** in Berlin with works by **Vanessa Beecroft, Yang Fudong, Inez & Vinoodh, Jürgen Klauke, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Helmut Newton, Barbara Probst, Viviane Sassen, Cindy Sherman, Bernd Uhlig, and Erwin Wurm.**

Performance is an independent art form, and photography is its constant companion. For the first time in Germany, this group exhibition brings together photo sequences whose origins lie in performance art, dance, and other staged events, complemented by a selection of street photography and conceptual photography series. With their common focus on the human body, the images document or interpret performances, which in many cases have also been initiated by the photographers themselves. The close connection between photography and performance, happenings, and action art has existed for many decades and ranges from the Dadaists and Surrealists to Viennese Actionism and the contemporary nude human installations made in the public space by Spencer Tunick. The works of the 13 internationally renowned artists are presented throughout the spaces of the Helmut Newton Foundation as if on multiple stages, where visitors can view images of people who, in the act of performance, seem to slip into dream-like, parallel planes of reality.

A relatively unknown work by **Helmut Newton** is the series of images he made of the dancers of the Ballet de Monte Carlo starting in the 1980s. Instead of depicting them on the classical stage, he photographed them on the streets of Monaco, on the steps behind the famous casino, near the emergency exit of the theatre building, or in the nude at his own home. Newton reinterpreted with these dancers the compositional idea that came to define his work – *Naked and Dressed* – and once again addressed the link between exhibitionism and voyeurism.

We encounter a similar theme with **Bernd Uhlig** and his images of the choreographies by **Sasha Waltz**, whom he has accompanied with his camera for many years. In dance photography, the composition of the figure(s) in the space is a decisive formal aspect, even while the photographic documentation of the work remains an interpretation. In the case of Bernd Uhlig and the dance company Sasha Waltz & Guests, a genuinely fleeting art form and its visual materialization find a congenial connection. With close-ups or gestures frozen in motion, or the whole stage choreography captured in a split second, Uhlig's photographs, as in Waltz's productions, alternate between architecture and the sensuality of the body playing the leading role.

Not unlike a dance theater production, Italian artist **Vanessa Beecroft** depicts nude or clothed women in elaborate tableaux vivants. The performances are often public and staged in galleries or museums, with women arranged sitting at long tables or in standing formations. During the hours-long actions they barely move, while Beecroft photographically documents their near-motionlessness; the performance and its image ultimately have equal standing in her oeuvre. Beecroft's legendary performance *VB55*, presented at Berlin's Nationalgalerie in 2005, involved several dozen women wearing transparent nylon pantyhose. Simultaneously nude and clothed, so to speak – which interestingly paraphrases the visual concept behind Helmut Newton's *Naked and Dressed* series.

Jürgen Klauke, with his life-sized *Viva España* series (1976/1979), on the other hand, only has two people interact: a man and a woman engaged in a mysterious dance on a dark stage. We see only the performers' bodies: the man stands while the woman whirls headfirst around him. Viewing the multi-part image sequence in succession gives the illusion of movement. Klauke allows the clothed or semi-clothed bodies of the man and woman to merge, which, similar to the numerous self-portraits he took of himself in drag around the same time, blurs the line between feminine and masculine.

We also encounter a sense of ambiguity in the work of **Cindy Sherman**, already in her early, small-format black-and-white series *Untitled Film Stills* from the late-1970s, in which she slips into ever-new roles like an actress. We find the young woman standing in the bathroom gazing into the mirror at her reflection, or perched on a low windowsill, looking out of an apartment window. In other images she appears outdoors in the city. Despite appearing to be unspectacular observations from everyday life, they are actually deliberately staged with the artist as the main character. Sherman continued the idea of role playing in her work, later disguising herself behind thick layers of make-up and wigs, masks, or breast prostheses in her colorful, untitled self-portraits from the year 2000. In her games of transformation, camouflage, and representation, Sherman also quotes the medium of film.

Erwin Wurm takes things to extremes through absurdity and humor when he asks people for a mini, one-minute performance in front of the camera. Players interact with objects to transform the street, interiors, or an Erwin Wurm exhibition into a stage for his *One Minute Sculptures*. Wurm thinks up the curious or absurd poses and situations that allow the visitors to become temporary works of art. Attempts to lie on narrow surfaces, to put one's head in a box, or to balance two cups on one's feet in the air while lying supine, are not always successful.

Viviane Sassen has been inspiring the fashion photo world for years with a highly distinctive approach. She also works primarily with the human body as her subject, sometimes capturing it in extreme contortions for a shot. She stages her models in unexpected ways, coloring their skin, obscured by shadow, mirrored, superimposed by objects, and often abstracted by cropping or framing the images, a method we know from Surrealism. She sometimes inverts the generally valid order of above and below, which results in a sense of disorientation for the viewer.

Barbara Probst, on the other hand, surprises with her own playfully experimental blend of classical street photography, portraiture, still life and, more recently, fashion. She arranges her photographs into diptychs, triptychs, and occasionally into wall-sized tableaux consisting of a dozen individual images in black-and-white and color. They always bear the same title, *Exposures*, and are distinguished with an image number, the location, and the exact date to the minute. Probst photographs the same situation with several cameras from different angles at the same time, triggered at exactly the same moment by radio waves.

Since the 1990s, Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin – known as the photographer duo **Inez & Vinoodh** – have been disrupting the photography world with their uncanny images. They were the first to introduce digital manipulation in both the fashion and the art field in the early 90's. The three exhibited series from these years which were their first time using the computer to alter the surface to visualize an internal highly emotional state. Inez & Vinoodh question our focus on outward perfection while the means of digital communication are taking over from any physical contact. The body of work from the early 90's showing men, women and children is combined with two more recent triptychs that deal with representation of a family in their own way while still addressing identity, innocence and dreams of gender. Their images capture the transgression of boundaries, and this connects them to Helmut Newton's earlier strategy of questioning "good taste" and subtly but intentionally challenging it visually "from within the system."

Yang Fudong's black-and-white photography is inspired by French film noir and even earlier films from Shanghai, made during a time when the Chinese port city was still very much inspired by the West. With his melancholic nudes he seems to conjure up a timeless past; in his films, as well, we encounter comparably reduced and enigmatic narratives. To show nudity so openly is still considered provocative in large parts of Chinese society. In his series *New Women*, one or more nude women sit or stand in a sparsely but luxuriously equipped studio set. The photographs seem like stills of the video film that he produced at the same time.

Robert Longo shot his photo sequence *Men in the Cities* in the late-1970s on the roof of his loft near Manhattan Bridge in New York City. We see people caught by the camera in unnatural poses. They appear to be dancing wildly, or replaying scenes from American western, war, or gangster films, for example when someone seems to fall in a hail of imaginary bullets. In fact, it was such a film still from Fassbinder's *The American Soldier* (1970) that inspired Longo to create this series of performative images. His models dodged swinging or thrown objects while Longo photographed their reaction.

Robert Mapplethorpe, on the other hand, choreographed only one person, in the chosen image, taken in 1980: the former bodybuilding world champion Lisa Lyon, who referred to herself as a sculptor of her own body. Mapplethorpe's staging of her nude body stretched out on a boulder in California's Joshua Tree National Park prompts us to consider stereotypes of femininity. Newton photographed Lyon in Paris around the same time and was equally fascinated by her muscular physique. The exhibition *Body Performance* thus closes the circle with this woman who is strong in the truest sense of the word.

Within the upcoming show at the Helmut Newton Foundation, viewers encounter a broad swathe of artistic actions and performances focusing on the human body: people dress up for unconventionally staged fashion shots, they move wildly on streets and rooftops, inhabit rocks and museum spaces, and appear as dancers on and off-stage. Role play and exceeding physical limitations are revealed by contemporary photographic perspectives on the most diverse visual aspects of body and space, dance, and movement. In both their presentation and their reception, these images provokes questions on self-perception, the gaze of the other, identity, and emotion.

For questions and press material please contact:

Helmut Newton Foundation

Museum for Photography

Dr. Matthias Harder

Jebensstrasse 2, 10623 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0) 30 318 648 56

www.helmutnewton.com

info@helmut-newton-foundation.org

Press contact

Nadine Dinter PR

Fasanenstrasse 70, 10719 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0) 30 398 87 411

Cell: +49 (0) 151 123 70 951

presse@nadine-dinter.de

press@helmut-newton-foundation.org